THE ALAMO HEIGHTS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT,
the heart of our community whose passion is excellence,
will educate and empower every student to excel academically
and as a confident, compassionate citizen
with impeccable character and a global perspective
through engaging, personally challenging,
and relevant experiences that INSPIRE LEARNING FOR LIFE.
A Note From Dr. Brown

I hope you are having a great summer. We have been very busy hiring staff, developing our budget, completing some construction projects, holding summer school and Summer at Heights for hundreds of students, running MIT (Mules in training) for our athletes, and many other activities. The 2013-14 year was a great success, and we are now gearing up to make 2014-15 even better. Here are some highlights of the year:

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPLETION

We have successfully completed 49 of the 51 initiatives in our strategic plan. That is a great accomplishment on the part of our entire staff and community who helped to develop the plan and implement it. Of the two remaining items, one is no longer needed while the other is designed and ready but lacks the necessary funding. We will take this next year to refine the work that has already been done before embarking on another strategic planning process.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Great teachers and strong instructional practices engage our students in learning, which has resulted in growth at all grades as seen through teacher-developed assessments, student grades and standardized tests such as the ACT, SAT, AP and STAAR tests. More importantly, the love of learning continues to grow in our students, which promises even more success in the years to come.

FISCAL STEWARDSHIP

AHISD received many awards this year for academic success, which is remarkable considering the financial stress we have faced the past three years. AHISD still has $422 per student less today than in 2010. The Board of Trustees serves as outstanding stewards of tax revenues while still ensuring a quality experience for our children. Innovative ideas like the two solar projects, thermal ice storage for our air conditioning system and energy efficiency projects are just a few of the ways the district has done more with less. This year, the district will send an additional $2.14 million in Robin Hood funds to the state, totaling a $25.6 million altogether, the most AHISD has ever had to send to the state.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Another way we have achieved success is through the support of our community. The Alamo Heights School Foundation donated more than $740,000 to the district to support numerous initiatives in the district. The PTO’s, booster clubs and support groups also play a vital role in the district. We are so grateful for this support.

Our mission statement says that AHISD is the “heart of our community whose passion is excellence.” Thank you for supporting our children, for supporting our district and for making the future of our community bright. Enjoy the rest of your summer!

A Note From a Graduate

I wanted to let you know the result of my AHISD education, where I will be going to college next year. I have been in Alamo Heights since attending Howard. Because of the opportunities I’ve been given and the education I’ve received in our district for the past 13 years, I have received offers of admission from Columbia University, Dartmouth College and Princeton. In April, I officially became a member of Princeton’s Class of 2018.

Thank you so much for leading such an amazing school district that gives all of us so many opportunities to learn both at school and beyond! I wouldn’t be going to Princeton next fall without the hard work of the AHISD faculty and staff. They strive each and every day to make sure that we as students receive the best education possible in an environment where success and high standards are not only fostered but expected as each and every one of us are pushed to reach our full potential as students.

~ Connor Pfeiffer, Class of 2014
The love for science at Alamo Heights Junior School can be measured by its success in UIL competitions and Science Olympiad, the largest non-profit science organization in the country.

Six years ago, AHJS Counselor Michael Snell and Science Teacher Cindy Puchalski started the UIL science program at the school and received amazing results in their first year - their students won the state championship.

In 2010, they began participating in Science Olympiad tournaments, where team events range from science applications to building hands-on projects. Mr. Snell says the program attracts all different types of students, who learn more than just science. "It teaches them camaraderie, a sense of teamwork, hard work, and dedication," says Snell. The passion for the program is quite evident to Mrs. Puchalski, as she laughingly recalls how much students talk about it. "They’ll talk to me before school. They’ll talk to me during class, at lunch bunch, and after school." She enjoys watching the students form strong bonds due to the significant amount of time they spend working together.

The road to the state competition is not an easy one. AHJS students must commit to weekly afterschool meetings, beginning in September and complete much of their projects outside of the classroom. "A lot of people think it’s a lot of work," says 6th grader Emily May. "but it’s just studying or building. You choose what you want to do."

Eighth grader Zane Meyer, who has participated in Science Olympiad since the 6th grade, believes it is preparing him for the future. "I want to become an engineer so Science Olympiad gives me the experience other things don’t."

Throughout the school year, the students compete in various invitational meets but their showing at regionals determines if they will be one of the top 30 teams invited to the state championship in May at Texas A&M University in College Station. So far, they have made the trip every year and always place in the top half of the competition. Mr. Snell credits Science Olympiad’s success to the support they receive not only from the district, but also from parents and families in the community.

Currently, there are approximately 40 AHJS students in the program, including 7th grader Saxton Rios, who says he doesn’t mind the extra science work. "It’s the environment that I like. It boosts my knowledge." It also gives 8th grader William Baker a sense of belonging. "I’ve always kind of been looking for places where I can just go somewhere and be surrounded by people who think like me, who have an understanding and appreciation for science."

Lucky for Baker and other 8th graders, Science Olympiad is also offered at Alamo Heights High School, where the program is continuing to grow with the help of both Snell and Puchalski. For their work, the duo was recently honored at the Alamo Heights School Board meeting and awarded the district’s Spotlight on Excellence Award.

Both share the same big goal for their team: To get to nationals, where only the two top teams in Texas are invited.

Special thanks to Rosalinda Montero for contributing this story.
JANUARY 2014

Steffanie Persyn

Each day, she strives to make her library warm and welcoming for her students. Whether actively engaged in reading a favorite novel, working on a class assignment, researching a topic via the Internet, or just chatting comfortabably about the latest book club read, students know that Steffanie works to create an ideal learning environment for her diverse audiences. She really seems to “get” kids. She knows what they like to read and stocks the shelves accordingly. She invites captivating authors to speak to engage and motivate a love for reading. She spends quality time with her students, creating a space and time for kids to do what they love. If a student is new to the library, Steffanie makes it a priority to visit with that student to form a friendship right away.
Steffanie knows and understands what real community is and has built a sanctuary for every one of her members.

FEBRUARY 2014

Jose Ortega

They call him Mr. O. He is known as calm, cool and collected in any situation and maintains professionalism at all times. Mr. O is far more important. He is Jose Ortega, a teaching assistant at Alamo Heights Junior School, and the recipient of the Spotlight on Excellence for February 2014.

Jose is recognized by his peers as going above and beyond the call of duty to help in any given situation. He is an advocate for students at all times and seems to know what direction they need and when they most need it.

His colleagues, who celebrate his pursuit of higher education as he studies to become a teacher, admire him. They recognize his unique talents, encourage his dream of teaching and welcome him into the realm of those who seek to guide and inspire students.

ROSTERONTEACHERSOFE
EXCELLENCE

Daniel Shea, Woodridge

His dream was to work on a cruise ship – whether it be a captain or a cruise director. After graduating from high school, he went to the University of Houston, thinking he would pursue a degree in Health, Leisure and Sports. A summer job at a day care center changed the trajectory of his career path. For the past seven years, Daniel has taught third grade at Woodridge Elementary.

Daniel has come to realize that his classroom is the cruise ship on which he wanted to work. Each year, he gets new passengers who are looking for a unique experience. “Although there may be unexpected rough seas from time to time, the journey is a trip filled with unforgettable memories, friendly encounters and life lessons.”

Erika Ganey, Cambridge

Born in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, Erika moved to Austin when she was seven years old. Although a native of Mexico, she considers herself an “Austin-ite.”

She attributes her passion and love for teaching to her early years in elementary school, after arriving in the U.S. unable to speak a word of English. The early years were difficult, yet she remembers admiring and valuing what educators did for her and the vital role her teachers played, contributing to her success, shaping her into the person she has become.

Erika shares that being a teacher has been the most rewarding experience. “I get to make a difference in innocent little people’s lives. I get more hugs and smiles in one day than most people get in a month. I get to contribute to their successes and be there for them when they need me.”

“Someone can sit in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.”
– WARREN BUFFETT
MARCH 2014

Elementary Academic Interventionists

During the course of the school year, the 14 interventionists across the elementary campuses have been tirelessly working to assess all students on basic math and reading skills. This is a huge task involving over 1,500 students. It would be easy to focus on data and statistics and lose sight of the students. This has not been the case with our Alamo Heights intervention team, otherwise known as the iTeam.

One specific incident highlights the excellence embodied by our campus interventionists. During the first week of school, an interventionist went to pick up a fifth grade student to administer a reading diagnostic test. As they walked down the hall, the student nervously confessed her fear and anxiety about taking the reading test. She had failed the STAAR reading test in both third and fourth grade. “Miss, I have to pass the test this year. I just have to.” In this desperate moment, the student wondered if she would fail again and remain in 5th grade as all her friends went on to Junior School. The interventionist stopped, looked the child in the eyes and simply said, “I got you.” When the child continued to worry about the reading test, the interventionist repeated, “I got you. This is going to be your year.”

Of course, as impressed as one would be by these moments of compassion, this kindness and support comes as no surprise. This incident, small and commonplace, speaks to a much larger truth about our interventionist. This is only one example — replicated and amplified across our campuses — that underscores the core of decency, of selflessness, of humanity that defines our iTeam professionals.

In arenas large and small, the intervention message is consistent: “We got you.”

It is embodied daily, sometimes hourly, in the path-breaking efforts of small group instruction, and in our interventionists’ unrelenting efforts to support teachers and staff through staff development, meetings, and hallway conversations. It is reflected through teamwork as interventionists cross grade level and campus lines to serve wherever they are most needed. It is abundantly evident in the almost palpable excitement of our faculty and staff, that our interventionists are the support system for students and teachers alike.

Congrats to the Alamo Heights Elementary Intervention Team: Suzanne Rea, Linda Neville, Michelle Dugie, Carol Johns, JoAnne Alverio, Roxanna Montes-Bazaldua, Patricia Gutierrez, Rhonda Coleman, Misty Coleman, Michael Reed, Gabby Joseph, Sherry Garner, Megan Massey and Carly Leech.

APRIL 2014

Patti Pawlik-Perales

As the Communications Coordinator for AHISD, she is the one who is usually highlighting the accomplishments of others in our district through photos, recognitions, videos, the media and social media.

Patti has an infectious positive attitude in everything she does. She brings enthusiasm to every task at hand. Her ready smile, tremendous sense of caring for others, and hard work ethic are worthy of recognition. She has taken our Communications office to new heights by supplying local media with positive stories about our students and staff. Additionally, Patti is a leader at the state level. She recently completed a year as President of the Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA). In this leadership role, she advocated for public schools across the state and nation. She served as an ambassador for all public schools and provided a state-wide spotlight on Alamo Heights ISD.

Patti is pictured with TSPRA Key Communicator Honoree, Dr. Jeff Turner, Superintendent of Schools for Coppell ISD, during TASB Annual Conference.

MAY 2014

Mike Snell & Cynthia Puchalski

Six years ago, Michael Snell brought the idea of Science Olympiad Competition to the AHJS and recruited Cyndi Puchalski to work alongside as a team sponsor. From that start, both he and Cyndi have dedicated countless hours working with sixth, seventh and eighth grade students in Olympiad, and Science Bowl competitions all around the state of Texas. Every single Friday afternoon, enthusiastic science students gather in Mrs. Puchalski’s classroom preparing for their upcoming events with the mentoring of both Mike and Cindy’s assistance. Then, five or six weekends a year, the team members pack up their bins, boomerangs, helicopters, robots, study cards, shoebox bins of rocks and mineral reference tools, and other equipment only recognizable to other olympiadians and set out on buses for travels to a variety of venues for competitions all over the region with middle school and high school students. Mike and Cindy deserve this recognition just for the number of overnight hotel room stays they have supervised over the past four years with middle school age teenagers, for the number of meals they’ve organized on the road, for the number of Buc-ee’s stops they’ve endured, and the number of on the road mini-crisis they’ve averted to promote success for their students!
Solar Power
REducing costs, saving money

Alamo Heights ISD is on track to save thousands of dollars a year by reducing its utility costs. All campuses in the district, including its maintenance building, are now fitted with solar panels. Monthly utility bills will be reduced by the amount of solar power the building uses instead of buying it from CPS Energy. “That will save the district approximately $39,000 annually,” says Mike Hagar, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance.

The renewable energy initiative began in 2010 when AHISD applied for CPS Energy’s Solartricity, a unique program meant to attract businesses to produce power. The difference is these selected businesses, in turn, sell the produced energy back to CPS at .27 cents per kilowatt, which is three times what the district pays in utility costs. The district was one of 10 recipients awarded the project. “We installed 500 kilowatts of solar arrays on our high school and Woodridge Elementary. That project was completed 2 years ago and it has generated approximately $235,000 annually for the school district,” says Hagar.

The district is currently in a 20-year contract to sell its power to CPS. Since the completion of Solartricity, the district wanted to continue its energy saving efforts by adding solar panels to its remaining campuses: Howard Early Childhood Center; Cambridge Elementary; Alamo Heights Junior School; Robbins Academy; and its maintenance building on Rittiman Road. Hagar says the additional panels cost $1 million but CPS rebates on solar helped offset the price, “CPS will rebate back to the district approximately $400,000 this year which will help in our general fund.”

The goal of Alamo Heights ISD has been to use more renewable resources while saving the district money in the long run. Hagar believes they are making progress, “Along with the solar panels, we also have an ice storage plant at the high school to help reduce energy. In addition, we recycle at all our campuses.”

Since the end of May, all district buildings with the new solar panels have been generating power. You can monitor and watch the live data by going to the Alamo Heights website at www.ahisd.net to learn more.
Summer Learning

SUMMER SCHOOL

Culminating a week of Jurassic studies, summer schoolers enjoyed a visit from the History Channel’s host of Jurassic Fight Club, Dinosaur George and a trip to the caverns!

Many of the special events and activities were made possible through a grant provided by the Alamo Heights School Foundation!

SUMMER AT HEIGHTS

Set in a fun, casual “summer camp” environment, Summer at Heights (SAH) attendees chose from a variety of creative camp options: Arts & Crafts, Chess, Theater, Dance, Sports, Music, Science, Robotics, and more!

Designed for students ages five and older, courses were provided to students throughout the community by some of San Antonio’s leading artists, educators, and professionals. With sessions for all ages and interests, students were provided the opportunity to experience new adventures, expand existing horizons, arouse curiosity, exchange ideas and products, stimulate creativity and give them a chance to laugh and have fun in the process.

AHSF MARTHA SPOOR YOUNG WRITERS WORKSHOP

Students are emersed in a week-long writing camp that encourages creativity through a variety of activities and provides the tools that help students strengthen their writing and story-telling foundations. The Alamo Heights School District and the Alamo Heights School Foundation thank Tookie and David Spoor for having the vision to honor their daughter’s legacy in the Alamo Heights schools through the establishment of the Martha Spoor Young Writers Fund.

New for 2014

ANNUAL PROOF OF RESIDENCY & ONLINE REGISTRATION

On August 1st, Alamo Heights ISD will begin annually requiring current proof of residence.

The district will also begin requiring all parents to utilize the new on-line registration system.

In order to access the on-line registration system, parents need a Home Access Center (HAC) account. If parents have not done so already, the district asks them to log-in to their Home Access Center account. This can be done by going to the AHISD website under the Students and Parents tab and clicking on “Home Access Center.”

If you have a student in the district, but have never utilized the HAC system, please contact one of the individuals listed below to gain access to your login and password. These individuals will be available to assist you beginning August 4.

If you already regularly use a HAC account, you can update your child’s information by logging in and then accessing the Registration tab located at the top of the page. If you have difficulty logging in to your account, you may need to reset your password. Simply contact your child’s campus and speak with one of the individuals listed below to regain access to your account:

Howard 832-5900 x5904  Leti Esquivel
Cambridge 822-3611 x5852  Gina De La Cruz
Woodridge 826-8021 x5887  Lizette Cervantes
AHJS 824-3231 x5803  Riki McCune
AHHS 820-8860  Michele Beaird

On-line registration opens Monday, August 4.

For those that do not have access to a computer or the internet, the district will provide several opportunities to complete the on-line registration process at the campus. These events have been scheduled to accommodate diverse schedules. The district will communicate these dates, times and locations through the website, social media and direct messaging via the School Messenger system.

CORRECTION

In the Alamo Heights ISD 2013 Annual Performance Report, the data for AP Exams was accurately depicted, however, it was the third best scores ever, not the best.
Back-to-School
August 11-15
New Employee Orientation
August 18
Convocation Ceremony
First Day for All AHISD Teachers
August 25
First Day of School
August 27
AHHS Athletics Kick Off Program
5:00-7:00 pm
September 8
AHJS Athletics Kick Off
4:30 – 7:30 pm, Cafeteria/Field
October 8
Howdy Parade, 4:00 pm
Howdy Night, 5:00-7:00 pm
October 10
Homecoming

Mule Markets
August 1-21, 2014
Cambridge
Online
August 1-29, 2014
Woodridge
Online
August 1-21, 2014
Alamo Heights Junior School
Online
August 20, 2014
9:00 – 11:00 am – 6th Grade
Mule Camp
August 21, 2014
Alamo Heights High School
Link Crew (9th Grade)
8:00 am – 3:00 pm
August 22, 2014
10th – 12th Grades
7:30 am – 12:00 pm

Meet the Teacher
August 21, 2014
Howard
Pre-K/Headstart/Kinder Orientation
9:00 – 9:30 am OR 12:00 – 12:30 pm
August 21, 2014
New to AHISD Kinder Preview
3:00-4:00 pm – Howard Library
August 21, 2014
Cambridge
4:30 – 5:00 pm – New to AHISD
5:00 – 6:00 pm – Meet the Teacher
August 21, 2014
Woodridge
4:30 – 5:00 pm – New to AHISD
5:00 – 6:00 pm – Meet the Teacher